

[George Peck]

“Endeavor”

HOWARD C. PECK, NORTHFIELD, CONN. Of all life's kindly blessings, that Heaven to earth has sent, The kindest are loving friendships and home, with sweet content! Let's faithful be to every friend! We may not pass this way again While journeying through life's busy throng and any good that we can do, Let's do it now! To-morrow's lowering setting sun may mark, for some of you, The journey's end, life's purpose done! Then do to-day for others, as ye would that others do for you! Train choicer flowers around the hearthstone, and along each life's pathway! Some life make brighter and the promise surer for our having lived to-day! Then, with loyalty to God, for home and native land, Be e'er our purpose and our achievement grand. * * * * * Two blades of grass, where only one was grown before! Another song, another smile, where only frowns our faces bore! Another word of sympathy, where lives are torn, And bitter healed to comfort those who mourn! Another kiss and fond caress, our hearts and friends to bless! Another flower-a rose-another grain of corn, Where only weeds and briars grew, and now and then a thorn! So let us make our lives and homes the choicest parts of earth, And in the toil and care and fret, thank God that He has given The Saviour Christ! to guide us on through life's pathway, And win for us a welcome home at last in Heaven!

W14993 1 Conn. 1938-9 GEORGE PECK

George Peck, the last of his family in Northfield, is a middle-aged gentleman whose only remaining connection with the village is the ownership of a small cottage to which is attached by means of a covered passway an incongruously large barn. A sign nailed to a tree on the property advertises for sale “this desirable cottage and dance hall ;” and Mr. Peck, employed by a utility company in Waterbury, visits Northfield weekly to tidy up the

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place and to await the inquiries of prospective purchasers, who have been to date, he declares, "not precisely numerous."

A Mr. Willette, who occupies a house adjoining the cottage, offers to accompany me after the initial search for Mr. Peck has been unsuccessful, and we eventually discover him in the rear of the barn, raking up rubble. He offers to see if he can "dig up something at the house" but expresses doubt that any scrap books or other records have escaped a general cleaning up which took place last fall.

Once inside the cottage he makes a vigorous search but is able to find only a small ledger, which contains names, birth and death dates of several generations of Pecks. The record is written in pen and ink, contains nothing of general interest. Mr. Peck is regretful. "Just what is it you want to know?" he asks. "If I can help you in any way I'll be glad to...."

"Stories? Why, I suppose I've heard dozens of 'em in my time, heard my father tell 'em and my uncle Howard. My 2 grandfather died before my time, but I've heard 'em tell tales about him. If I could only remember some of them. You know how it is when you try to think of things like that...I remember 'em telling how my grandfather, Jeremiah that was, came over here from Watertown. A bunch of Northfield farmers went to Watertown and asked him to move his mill over here. They wanted a grist mill in the village. Moved everything over for him free. You've heard about that mill I imagine. They even ground bone for fertilizer there.

"And after my grandfather died my father and my uncle sold things at the mill. No, I don't think you'd call it a general store, it had more variety than a general store, even. Sure I remember it. Remember when it burned down too. One of the old wheels from that mill is right outside the door here. Show you when we go out.

"I can remember running down there with the rest of them the night of the fire. Trying to save some of the stuff. It must have been ten or eleven o'clock at night. No system of fire protection in the village. Just save what you could and watch the rest burn, that was the

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way it was. Fire was what you might call the village bugbear. Everybody dreaded it. They saved a little of the stuff, but not very much....

“Well, you want to hear some stories. Now if I can only remember some...My grandfather, they say, was very strongly opposed to drink and dancing. He was also a strong Anti-Slavery man. But drink and dancing were his pet hates. I remember them telling about how one time he went down to Thomaston to do some buying or something of the sort, and some 4 call her, that lived next door here. I used to be able to imitate her pretty good. They had a lingo all their own, those old limeys did.

“And there was the story about Tom Gill and Hughie Jackson who got drunk and went for a ride in a horse and buggy. Neither one of them could handle a horse and even if they could they were too drunk to do it. The horse ran wild, and they were having a hard time holding on. Hughie had the reins. He hollered, ‘What’ll I do now, Tom?’

‘I don’t know,’ says Tom, ‘but if I only had a grindstone we could throw it out for an anchor.’

Mr. Willette, who has been listening to the conversation, laughs heartily. “I’ve heard that a little different, and it’s supposed to be a true story,” he says. “They say the horse ran away, but that they actually had a grindstone in the wagon and threw it out. It broke the norsers neck.”

Mr. Peck: “I never heard that. Harry Gill up here can tell you something about the knifemakers. They used to call Harry ‘KaDyke.’ They said that was a shortened form of ‘Come Dick,’ The old Englishmen used to call most of the young lads ‘dick.’ ‘Come Dick and blow the bellows up,’ that’s what they used to say to Harry, I remember.

“Old Black Jack Mason was another character. He had a black beard. And he used to go on some great toots. I remember them telling how when he got drunk one time in that little barroom across from the shop he lit his pipe with a ten dollar bill.”

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Mr. Willette: "Money must have been plentiful in those days."

Mr. Peck: "It wasn't as scarce as it is right now, I imagine..... "Well, I'm trying to sell this place. I ran a few dances here this winter, but I don't think I'll bother with that any more. I imagine if my grandfather know what I was using this old barn for, he'd turn over in his grave. This barn was built in eighteen hundred, my father told me. There's timber in there so hard that you can't drive a tenpenny nail into it. Fact. "I think it still could be made to pay, if the right party took it over. Somebody could put in a tea room there in the cottage. Or maybe some of these New York people that are looking for property up around this way might be interested in it.

"I'll kind of miss it at that, though. I get a kick out of coming up here on my day off and fooling around the old place."